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Heaven Leaves

The Christian's Dependence

Leaven Leaves.

"*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.*"
GALATIANS v. 9.

THE CHRISTIAN'S

Dependence

UPON HIS

Redeemer.

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By ARCHBISHOP SUMNER.

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"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itſelf, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me."—*John* xv. 4.

THE

CHRISTIAN'S DEPENDENCE UPON HIS REDEEMER.

It is ſcarcely poſſible to contemplate the Chriſtian character, as deſcribed in the Goſpel, and held up to our imitation, without acknowledging an excellence truly divine. This may juſtly be attributed to that religion which, if it were univerſally obeyed, would extinguiſh all the vices which diſturb human ſociety and diſgrace human nature; would ſubdue pride, violence, ſelfiſhneſs, and ſen-

ſuality, and introduce in their ſtead humility, charity, temperance, mutual forbearance; would repreſs all that eager deſire after temporal advantages which excites evil paſſions through the colliſion of intereſts; and would unite all men in one purſuit—the only purſuit in which all could unite, and yet aſſiſt inſtead of counteracting each other—that of ſtudying to do the will of God for the ſake of everlaſting happineſs.

Were men to preſume ſo far as to invent a teſt by which the divine origin of a religion ſhould be tried, I can imagine none more unexceptionable than its tendency to overcome what is acknowledged to be evil in human nature, and

to raiſe in an immeaſurable degree the ſtandard of happineſs. I can imagine no eulogy more complete than this—that if all men lived up to the ſpirit of the Goſpel, few ſources of misery would remain in the world, and even that remainder would receive the utmoſt alleviation.

The only objection which has ever been urged againſt the true Chriſtian character, derives whatever force it has from the diſobedience of mankind. It has been ſaid, that the meekneſs, the patience under injuries, which it preſcribes, is incompatible with our condition on earth, and would expoſe the man who ſhould ſtrictly comply with its demands to in-

dignities and wrongs without remedy. But, if this were true, which it is not to any material extent, as experience proves, even under the preſent circumſtances of Chriſtianity, it would afford no argument againſt a religion which requires abſtinence from injuries no leſs poſitively than patience under them. Would it improve the condition of mankind, if reſiſtance were permitted where patience is now enjoined? Or would it be conſiſtent with the Divine Author of the religion to annul one of his laws becauſe another was broken? Let a human legiſlator ſometimes condeſcend, if neceſſary, to the refractory ſubjects with which he has to deal. But it is not, ſurely, for

God to yield to the paſſions which rebel againſt his will, but to ordain where their proud waves ſhall be ſtayed. In no other way can the ſtandard of human nature be raiſed and improved.

An objection more plauſibly reaſonable might perhaps be alleged againſt the Chriſtian character, grounded on the impoſſibility of reaching and ſuſtaining it, not only from the oppoſition of the ſurrounding world, but from the oppoſition of the natural heart; which we confeſs, nay avow, riſes more or leſs againſt all the qualities which form the conſiſtent Chriſtian. The anſwer to this objection is conveyed in the text. The Chriſtian has on his ſide

one who is greater than his natural heart. He "can do all things through Chriſt that ſtrengtheneth him." As there is an inſeparable connection between the faith and practice of a Chriſtian, ſo is there likewiſe a myſtical union between the Chriſtian and his Redeemer, the "author and finiſher of his faith," which enables him both to "will and to do of his good pleaſure." This is deſcribed by a ſtrong, but clear and moſt intelligible metaphor, when it is compared to the union between a tree and its branches. It is not pretended that our natural unaided ſtrength would enable us to comply with the demands of the Goſpel. Our Lord expreſſly de-

clares to his diſciples, "Without me ye can do nothing." But he promiſes ſuch aſſiſtance of his Spirit from above as ſhall make them both willing and able in "the day of his power." He compares them to the branch, which, itſelf ſeparated at a diſtance from the root and the ſoil which nouriſhes the root, is made fruitful by the juices which the ſtem ſupplies, but can bear no fruit from the time that it is ſevered from the parent tree. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itſelf, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me."

But as the expreſſion which exhorts us to "abide in Chriſt" is confeſſedly

figurative, it becomes neceſſary to conſider in what way we may be ſaid to comply with the condition on which our power of obedience depends. What is it "to abide in Chriſt?" It is to live in habitual faith in his redemption, and in habitual reliance upon his Spirit.

1. And, firſt, as to habitual faith. FAITH is a word ſo familiar to our ears and our lips, that we may be eaſily misled into a groundleſs belief that we underſtand, nay, adopt it, in its full and ſcriptural acceptation. But trace it back to its original meaning, and by that ſignification try your feelings with reſpect to Chriſt. That ſignification is, ſuch a belief or perſuaſion as leads to truſt, re-

liance, confidence. And if we conſider the offer or call of Chriſt, we ſhall perceive that the truſt or confidence which he requires may be juſtly termed "abiding in him." He came into the world to deliver mankind from the darkneſs of ignorance and ſin—*i. e.*, from ſpiritual blindneſs and alienation from God, a ſtate inconſiſtent with their ſalvation. He came to redeem them from puniſhment; to renew their hearts by his Holy Spirit; to aſſign them rules for ſuch a life as God approves. And in the fulfilment of this purpoſe, his language is, Ye who live in the world, the poſterity of Adam, are "enemies to God," who is a God of holineſs, "by wicked works."

This enmity, this wickedneſs, he does not puniſh now; but after death there is judgment, when he will inflict "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh, upon every ſoul of man that doeth evil." But truſt in me, and I will, for you, appeaſe that wrath, and diſarm that indignation; cleave to me, and follow the commandments which I ſet before you; then will I lead you ſafely through the "valley of the ſhadow of death," by which you muſt paſs to an eternal world, and will *preſent you* pure and *faultleſs* before the throne of your Almighty Judge.

Now an offer of this nature precludes the idea of a paſſive or heſitating recep-

tion. It is a perſonal offer, which muſt be perſonally accepted or perſonally rejected. It requires, firſt, that we ſee our neceſſity, and are therefore ready to apply for help; that we feel our deſert of puniſhment, and therefore deſire a ranſom. But it requires more alſo; for one might feel his neceſſity, and wiſh for relief, and yet doubt the power of him who offered it: it requires, therefore, a firm perſuaſion that he who makes the offer is able to make the offer good; and, in the ſpecial caſe of Chriſt, it requires us to believe that he can and will ſave us, has ranſomed us, is able to beſtow on us his Holy Spirit, and to prepare us for an eternal kingdom, into

which he will hereafter receive us, if we follow him obediently here.

Such is the correſponding movement on our parts by which his gracious offer muſt be met; ſuch is the willing hand which we muſt ſtretch out to receive the proffered boon, or it is propoſed to us in vain. "Faith is not merely a ſpeculation, but a practical acknowledgment of Jeſus as the Chriſt; an effort and motion of the mind towards God; when the ſinner, convinced of ſin, accepts with thankfulneſs the proffered terms of pardon, and in humble confidence applying individually to himſelf the benefit of the general atonement, in the elevated language of a venerable

father of the Church, 'drinks deep of the ſtream which flows from the Redeemer's ſide.' The effect is, that in a little time he is filled with that 'perfect love of God which caſteth out fear'—he cleaves to God with the entire affection of the ſoul." * And the queſtion, whether we are abiding in Chriſt, comes to this—have we that confidence, that truſt, that dependence upon him, which induces us to accept his offer, and are we ready to commit ourſelves—I ſhould rather ſay, have we committed ourſelves—into his hands, both for this world and the next, inſtead of taking our chance for what may come, or inſtead of truſt-

* *Biſhop Horſley.*

ing to our own power, our own goodneſs, our own views of religion? Then we can ſay with the apoſtle, "I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him againſt that day" (2 Tim. i. 12). This acceptance of his offer is FAITH; and to have ſo accepted it as to be habitually living by it, and depending on it, is to "abide in Chriſt:" then he is to the Chriſtian what the ſtem is to the branch—the ſole ſupport on which it leans.

2. But the branch receives from its ſtem not only ſupport, but nouriſhment; and ſo, to *abide in Chriſt* is, ſecondly, to rely upon his Spirit for ſuch grace as

may make and keep us his obedient followers. What is the branch, when deprived of the juices which the parent ſtem conveys to it? Withered, or at beſt barren. And ſuch is he who is without that divine aid which alone can overcome the corruption of nature, and enable the heart to refuſe the evil which is offered it in the world, and chooſe the good which the Scripture ſets before it. This Spirit is sent, this affiſtance given, to thoſe who unite themſelves to Chriſt by faith. "To as many as receive him, to them gives he power to become the ſons of God" (John i. 12)—power in its double ſenſe of privilege and ability. He authoriſes them to call upon God

by the endearing title of *Abba*, *Father* (Rom. viii. 15); and he enables them to know that they are *born of God*, and are *his children*, and *love him*, by this infallible and apoſtolical rule, that they "keep his commandments" (1 John i. 2–15); that "ſin hath no more dominion over them" (Rom. vi. 14); that they are "led by his Spirit" (ib. viii. 14).

This myſterious union between the Chriſtian and his Redeemer, through the Holy Spirit, is diſtinctly and frequently recogniſed in Scripture. St Paul ſpeaks of the Epheſians as a "habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 22); of the Corinthians as "the tem-

ple of the Holy Ghoſt" (1 Cor. vi. 19); and prays for the diſciples, that "Chriſt may dwell in their hearts by faith, that they may know what is the exceeding greatneſs of his power towards thoſe who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph. iii. 17; i. 19). "I live unto God," he ſays; "yet not I, but Chriſt liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20).

And again, the effect of this union is the Chriſtian's ability to maintain an obedience the moſt contrary and oppoſite to his natural inclinations. Through this he is enabled to ſubdue the luſts of the fleſh, though they be precious as a right eye, or valuable as a right arm; is

enabled to overcome all undue anxiety about worldly advantages, and commit himſelf entirely to the will of God, "knowing that God careth for him." Such has been the heartfelt experience of his ſervants in every age. "I know," ſays the apoſtle, "both how to be abaſed, and I know how to abound: I can do all things through Chriſt, who ſtrengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 12). And of his miniſterial labours he ſays, "I ſtrive according to his working, which worketh in me mightily" (Col. i. 29). The well-known paſſage, in which he ſpeaks of the "thorn in his fleſh, the meſſenger of Satan," whatever the alluſion may be, tends to the ſame purpoſe. "For this

thing," he ſays, "I beſought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me" (2 Cor. xii. 7, &c.) And he ſaid unto me, "My grace is ſufficient for thee: for my ſtrength is made perfect in weakneſs." And he proceeds to declare it as the reſult of his practical experience, that when he was weakeſt in himſelf, then he was ſtrongeſt in the power of his Lord.

All this clearly ſhows where the reliance of a Chriſtian muſt be placed, and that his ſtrength will be in proportion to the ſteadfaſtneſs of his reliance. And to continue in this humble, yet confident dependence, the effect of the lively faith before deſcribed, is to *abide in*

Chriſt. While "we thus dwell in him he dwells in us," and enables us to "work out our ſalvation," in the mode which he has appointed us to follow, in ſpite of the oppoſition which meets us without, and haunts us within. The aſſurance is verified: "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the ſame bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing" (John xv. 5).

No doubt, if this is Chriſtian faith (and what elſe anſwers the deſcription given of the power of faith in Scripture?), it is ſomething far beyond bearing the Chriſtian name, and poſſeſſing that general knowledge of the doctrines of the Goſpel, and paying them that degree of

attention, which ordinarily paſſes for the profeſſion of Chriſtianity. It ſuppoſes a more deliberate ſurrender of ourſelves to him, a more complete reliance upon him for the Spirit by which we muſt be ſanctified, as well as the merits by which we muſt be juſtified, than many either deem neceſſary, or intelligible, or practicable.

But the more you conſider the nature of that evidence by which our Lord's miſſion ſtands confirmed, the more you will be convinced of the wiſdom of ſubmitting yourſelves entirely to be ruled by him for the great purpoſe of ſalvation. And the more you ſtudy that book in which the purpoſe of his miſſion is un-

folded, and his commands, which are the commands of God, diſcloſed, the more ſurely you will find that nothing ſhort of this total dependence upon him can enable you to ſatisfy, even in the loweſt degree, the demands which he makes upon you for progreſſive holineſs and unreſerved obedience.

If, therefore, you are ſincerely ſeeking the only path of ſafety, inſtead of renouncing the idea of that union with Chriſt which is implied in the text as viſionary, you will deſire it more and more. It is not pretended that men arrive at it immediately, or that it is at once complete: we are directed to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our

Lord Jeſus Chriſt" (2 Pet. iii. 18); and this growth muſt be cheriſhed, like the growth of anything elſe that is not natural to us, by uſing the appointed means.

Read, then, the Goſpel with this view; ſee how the graces expected in a Chriſtian are ſaid to flow from Chriſt as their ſource; how uniformly the grace by which they are produced is promiſed to thoſe who truſt in him. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye ſhall aſk what ye will, and it ſhall be done unto you" (John xv. 7). Meditate frequently on this appointed way of acceſs to God. It is a common error for men who have attained their knowledge of

God through the Chriſtian revelation, to keep out of ſight the main object of that revelation, as appointing the means by which God is graciouſly willing to be approached, and thus to exclude the Mediator from their view; relapſing into a ſort of natural religion, which turns our noonday into darkneſs, though it would have been as the light of the ſun to the heathen world. Bear conſtantly in mind that it is only as a member of that body of which Chriſt is the head, as a plant in that vineyard which he has prepared for himſelf, and tends with his continual grace, that you have any knowledge of God, any confidence before him, any ſure ground of acceptance with him.

It is only through the adoption which you enjoy through Chriſt that you have any right to call upon him as your "Father which is in heaven" (Rom. viii. 15, &c.) As long as you "abide in him," and "he in you," and no longer, God has covenanted to receive your prayers. A habitual ſenſe of thoſe bleſſings which you derive from him will lead you onward to the ſureſt means of attaining ſtrength for obedience, the "continuing inſtant in prayer." It was thus that our Lord himſelf, during that ſeaſon of humiliation in which he bore our nature, maintained his union with the Father, from whoſe manſions he had deſcended. And it was thus, as we

learn throughout the acts and writings of the apoſtles, that they preſerved that ſpirit of entire dependence, together with that energy of active obedience, which it becomes us to make the ſtandard of our diſtant imitation. All union is ſtrengthened by intercourſe; but the only intercourſe which we can enjoy with a heavenly Lord we are alike invited and commanded to uſe, the intercourſe of prayer.

Laſtly, communion with our Redeemer is maintained by his ſacraments; by never loſing ſight of the privileges of baptiſm; and by a regular attendance at the holy table. The ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper was eſpecially ordained

with this view. There we myſtically "eat the fleſh of Chriſt, and drink his blood;" and thus forcibly reminded of his death, and ſolemnly declaring our perſonal acceptance of his ſalvation, we experience that "his fleſh is meat indeed, his blood is drink indeed" (John vi. 55); able to nouriſh in our ſouls a principle of holineſs, "ſpringing up unto everlaſting life" (ib. iv. 14).

There may be ſome, perhaps, who will ſet at naught the idea of this union, this perſonal intercourſe with the Redeemer, and aſperſe it with the formidable name of Enthuſiaſm. But, my brethren, "let no man deceive you with vain words." "Enthuſiaſm is founded

neither on reaſon nor divine revelation."* This intercourſe is agreeable to reaſon, and has both the letter and ſpirit of the Goſpel as its foundation, and is therefore firmly built and eſtabliſhed by all the evidence which eſtabliſhes the Goſpel. So far from yielding to the erroneous notion, that no ſuch intercourſe can be believed without enthuſiaſm, remember that it is the object of all divine revelation, and moſt eſpecially the nature of the Chriſtian faith, by removing the veil of ignorance, and ſetting aſide the barrier of ſin, to diminiſh the diſtance which ſeparates God from men; and thus to prepare them by degrees for that future

* *Locke.*

ſtate of glory, in which they may ſee their "*Maker face to face*, and *know* him, even as they are *now known* of him" (1 Cor. xiii. 12). The aſſurance of the Scriptures is, "Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh unto you" (James iv. 8): but a vague apprehenſion that any of the acts or thoughts by which we can *draw nigh unto him* are to be avoided as enthuſiaſtic, that any of the comfortable aſſurances by which he *draws nigh unto us* are to be regarded as viſionary, deprives us of all the "joy and peace in believing" which that myſterious mercy, "God manifeſted in the fleſh," was deſigned to afford. Indeed, you will not long incline your hearts towards him, or

apply to the ſtudy of the Scriptures, to religious meditation and prayer, without experiencing proof of the reality of a ſpiritual union with the *Author of our faith*, far beyond what argument can give, or external evidence ſupply. You will find the truth which is received within anſwered by the peace which ariſes in your hearts; you will find the ſureſt teſtimony of Chriſt's preſence there, from your increaſing deſire of holineſs, and increaſing power over your remaining corruption. You will find that the "grace of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and the communion of the Holy Spirit," are real and ſubſtantial gifts, atteſting the divinity and confirming the

truth of Him *who hath redeemed us*, and rewarding as many as receive him, and *abide in* him, with that "peace of God which paſſeth all underſtanding."